

The Augsburg Confession 3

Lesson Three: Articles II and XVIII

Introduction

When we speak of Original Sin and of Free Will, it's important to define the terms carefully and note precisely the circumstances we are speaking about.

Terms to know:

- **Concupiscence** – The natural inclination and desire to sin.
- **Liberum arbitrium** – Free will. The ability to choose. In theology, the ability to choose right and wrong, what is pleasing and what is displeasing to God.
- **Seruum arbitrium** – Bound will. The inability to choose. In theology, the inability to choose right and wrong, what is pleasing and what is displeasing to God.

Match the time and circumstances in the left column with the human condition in the right column:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• After creation, before the fall into sin• After the fall into sin• After conversion by the Holy Spirit• In heaven | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unable to sin (<i>non posse peccare</i>)• Unable not to sin (<i>non posse non peccare</i>)• Able not to sin (<i>posse non peccare</i>) |
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Article II: Original Sin

¹ It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers' wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God. ² Moreover, this inborn sickness and hereditary sin is truly sin and condemns

to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.

³ Rejected in this connection are the Pelagians and others who deny that original sin is sin, for they hold that natural man is made righteous by his own powers, thus disparaging the sufferings and merit of Christ.

- **Pelagians** – Followers of Pelagius, a British monk, who at the beginning of the fifth century taught that man is not sinful by nature and can be saved by his own willing and doing. He was opposed by Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430), who taught that a person can only be saved by God's grace through the merits of Jesus Christ.

Positive (True) Doctrines

All people are conceived and born in sin

- The introduction of original sin was Adam's fall. **Romans 5:12**; Acts 17:26.
- Not each individual human being falls into original sin individually. **Psalm 51:5**; Ephesians 2:3; **Genesis 6:5**; 8:21.
- Original sin was not created by God. **Genesis 1:27**; 1:31; Ephesians 4:24.
- The scope of original sin: "All men who are born according to the course of nature." 1 Kings 8:46; Psalm 14:2,3; **Romans 3:22,23**; John 3:6; Genesis 5:3; Job 14:4.
 - Jesus Christ is therefore excluded from this scope. Matthew 1:20; **John 8:46**.
 - Mary the mother of Jesus is not excluded. **Luke 1:46,47**. (The immaculate conception was proclaimed by Pope Pius IX in 1854).

- The results of original sin. “All men... are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God.” **Ephesians 2:1,5**
- The spiritual implication: “Without God present, man cannot be holy.” 1 Corinthians 2:14; **Romans 8:7**; Colossians 1:21.
- The ethical implication: Man is “with concupiscence.” Matthew 7:18; 15:19; **Jeremiah 17:9**; Romans 3:10-13; Colossians 3:5-6.

Original sin is truly sin.

- Not the loss of an “abundant gift,” and not just a neutral zone somewhere between “justified” and “condemned.”

Original sin condemns.

- John 3:5-6; **Ephesians 2:3**. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; we were by nature the children of wrath.
- Not only Adam, Genesis 2:17.
- Original sin and its guilt are imputed also to us. **Romans 5:18,19**.

This condemnation can be escaped only by a new birth. John 3:3,5,6; **Titus 3:5**. “Sinners must die, says Romans 6:23, either eternally or baptismally” (Schroeder: *Christ’s Love, Our Calling*, p. 5).

For reflection

What do you find most troubling about the doctrine of Original Sin, as it is taught in the Bible?

Some people are very kind and generous. Babies appear innocent and untarnished by the wickedness around us in the world. What is *prima facie* evidence that Original Sin infects every human being born according to nature?

Negative (False) Doctrines

- Pelagius: Man is from his birth as before the fall. The cause of sin is education and custom (environment and example). There may be and has been complete sinlessness.
- The Roman Church is Semi-Pelagian: The will of natural man is only somewhat weakened. Concupiscence in the regenerate is not sin (only an opportunity for strengthening through a struggle against sin).
- Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531): Original sin is only a disease (it doesn’t merit condemnation).

Where did Pelagius get his ideas?

Explain why the Roman Church remains Semi-Pelagian in its teaching and approach to salvation.

Article XVIII: Of Free Will

¹ It is also taught among us that man possesses some measure of freedom of the will which enables him to live an outwardly honorable life and to make choices among the things that reason comprehends. ² But without the grace, help, and activity of the Holy Spirit man is not capable of making himself acceptable to God, of fearing God and believing in God with his whole heart, or of expelling inborn evil lusts from his

heart. ³ This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who is given through the Word of God, for Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:14, “Natural man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God.”

⁴ In order that it may be evident that this teaching is no novelty, the clear words of Augustine on free will are here quoted from the third book of his *Hypognosticon*: “We concede that all men have a free will, for all have

a natural, innate understanding and reason. However, this does not enable them to act in matters pertaining to God (such as loving God with their whole heart or fearing him), for it is only in the outward acts of this life that they have freedom to choose good or evil. ⁵ By good I mean what they are capable of by nature: whether or not to labor in the fields, whether or not to eat or drink or visit a friend, whether to dress or

undress, whether to build a house, take a wife, engage in a trade, or do whatever else may be good and profitable. ⁶ None of these is or exists without God, but all things are from him and through him. ⁷ On the other hand, by his own choice man can also undertake evil, as when he wills to kneel before an idol, commit murder, etc.”

Terms to know:

- **Synergism** – Working together. In theology the idea that man collaborates and cooperates with God to bring about his own salvation.
- **Monergism** – One-sided working. In theology, the idea that God alone does everything to bring about the result of man’s salvation.

We believe, teach and confess

- Natural man has some freedom to choose in matters subject to reason.
 - Things which are useful
 - Civil righteousness
 - Living an outwardly honorable life
 - But only to a certain extent, always limited by God’s providence (James 4:13-15) and by a person’s own concupiscence (John 8:34).
- In spiritual matters man has no free will.
 - Regeneration/conversion
 - Fear of God and faith in God
 - Resisting temptation

All of this is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. **1 Corinthians 2:14**; Psalm 14:3; Ephesians 2:1; Colossians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 12:3; **Philippians 2:13**.